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AUTHOR Washington, Earl M.
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ABSTRACT

The shortage of black faculty at predominantly white institutions is discussed, along with the efforts of Western Michigan University to increase the number of black faculty. Reasons cited for the shortage of black faculty (about 4% of U.S. faculty in 1980 were black) include institutional racism, failure of affirmative action policies, low numbers of black Ph.Ds, declining emphasis on recruiting and retaining minority graduate students, and a discouraging job outlook for new doctorate holders. A decreasing black faculty presence means fewer role models for black graudate students, who may find white colleges inhospitable. Western Michigan University has created The Black College Program to promote the professional development of faculty from historically black institutions. Junior faculty from black schools can enroll in graduate programs to attain advanced degrees or specialized training. Fellowships and assistantships are available, and reciprocal financial support from the home institution is encouraged. The university hopes to increase the number of blacks holding advanced degrees and to recruit graduates to become its faculty, as well as to broaden the exposure of its white faculty and students to the black culture. The home institution may also increase the number of black faculty with advanced degrees. (SW)

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WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY'S BLACK COLLEGE PROGRAM, SWELLING THE BLACK FACULTY COHORT

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EARL M. WASHINGTON, Ed.D.
THE BLACK COLLEGE PROGRAM, DIRECTOR
WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

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Few and none are the best two words to sum up the number of Black faculty at predominantly white colleges and universities. There have never been many Black faculty members at predominantly white universities and in recent years that number has further diminished. In 1980, just six years ago, approximately 4 percent of the nation's university faculty were Black. Today that number is estimated at 2 percent. If this is a trend, then the projection for the latter portion of the 80's is, indeed, dismal.

One might reasonably ask the causes of this phenomenon. Several authorities have voiced opinions. In an article that appeared in The Chronicle of Higher Education, William B. Harvey attributed the shortage of Black faculty, first to institutional racism.[1] He contends that when vacancies at predominantly white institutions occur, those who are charged with the responsibility of filling such vacancies are white males. According to Harvey, the evidence shows that white males will more than likely make selections according to the following order: white male; white female, Black male; and finally Black female. It is important to note that since the inception of affirmative action procedures, white females have made significantly more progress with respect to faculty positions than have Black males. Thus, one sees a manifestation of the old addage, Blacks are the last to be hired.

Harvey attributed the failure of affirmative action as a second reason for the shortage of Black professors. Affirmative action officers are rarely in position to veto the hiring of one professor in favor of another. Most affirmative action officers serve as processors who tell others about the availability of minority candidates. In actuality, affirmative action officers do little about the final selection of faculty. Impeding the progress of affirmative action is a general relaxation of pressure by the Federal Government.

In addition to the aforementioned reasons for the shortage of Black faculty, (institutional racism, and the failure of affirmative action policies), is the fact that there is such a low number of Black Ph.D.'s. Some would argue that this reason should be placed number one, that is, that the number one cause of the scarcity of Black faculty is the low number of Black Ph.D.'s. Few would disagree that the number of Blacks holding the Ph.D. is indeed, low, but this does not explain why during the latter half of the 1970's the number of Black faculty declined while the number of Black Ph.D.'s increased. Such a phenomenon strengthens the argument that institutional racism is a more prominent cause than is the lack of Black Ph.D.'s for the low number of Black faculty.

The scarcity of Black Ph.D.'s is attributed to a variety of causes. The most frequently cited causes include the declining importance that universities have

assigned to recruiting and retaining minority graduate students and the discouraging job outlook for new doctorate holders. One frequently cited cause is particularly noteworthy because it is a "Catch 22" conundrum: There are few Black faculty because there are few Black Ph.D.'s. There are few Black Ph.D.'s because there are few Black faculty to serve as role models and mentors to those Black graduate students who aspire to be Ph.D.'s. Dwight Andrews, the first Black graduate student in music theory at Yale made this observation, "Often minority students come but don't finish. Many get left by the wayside, especially when it comes to mentoring and finding some advocates."[2]

Finding mentors or role models becomes more difficult as the decline in minority graduate students continues. Studies show that scholars tend to act as mentors to students who are most like themselves. Consequently, as things presently exist, the instructional system appears to be geared to support the white male student.

What are the effects of having a shortage of Black faculty? According to several sources, the presence of Blacks on faculties is the most significant predictor of success in recruiting and retaining Black students.[3] This factor is particularly important when we recognize that recruiting and retaining Black graduate students will, eventually affect the number of Black faculty. In addition, a decreasing Black faculty presence means fewer role models for student. There has been repeated documentation that for Black students the atmosphere at predominantly white colleges is inhospitable,

some say antagonistic. By serving as advisers and counselors to Black students, Black faculty help to buffer the antagonism felt on predominantly white campuses by Black students.

If Black students are helped by the presence of Black faculty, then so are white students and white faculty. White students when seeing few Blacks among their professors may erroneously conclude that few Blacks have the right stuff--the qualifications--to serve as college professors. Taking a course with a Black professor would provide the kind of experience and interaction that would help white students to overcome prejudicial notions the students may harbor about Black intellectual capabilities. White faculties, likewise, through discussion and mutual exchange of ideas and perspectives, stand to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation for Black cultural heritage.

The shortage of Black faculty is a problem that is being addressed by several sources nation-wide. The Ford Foundation has restored its $9 million program that it had ended in 1981. The program will be administered by the National Academy of Sciences and will provide 50 fellowships a year for the next three years. A new program in the University of California system, the President's Fellowship Program, will offer some 20 dissertation and post-doctoral scholarships a year. This program is uniquely designed to provide minority graduate students with mentor help because it pairs entering minority students with established scholars. In

addition to these two is the Committee on Institutional Cooperation, a consortium of the Mid-West's Big Ten universities and the University of Chicago. This program has expanded its Minority Fellowships' Program to include summer research stipends for juniors and seniors in college.

Most of the programs that are currently underway are organized and sponsored by large consortiums and or private corporations. An exception to this arrangement is the effort put forth by Western Michigan University of Kalamazoo. Western Michigan is in many ways a good representative model of America's higher education institutions. It is a relatively large and complex, major, predominantly white university with an enrollment of about 19,000 undergraduates and graduates. Western Michigan has over 700 faculty, about 2 percent of whom are Black. The university offers, in addition to undergraduate studies, eight doctorate degrees, including counseling and counselor education, educational leadership, mathematics, science education, sociology, special education, public administration, and psychology. In addition Western offers the master's degree in more than forty areas.

Like most of the country's major higher education institutions, Western Michigan is concerned with recruitment and retention of Black students and with its lack of success in hiring Black faculty. Prompting these concerns are data reported by Dr. Harold L. Hodgkinson, senior fellow in resi-

dence at the Institution for Educational Leadership in Washington, D. C., and former director of the National Institute of Education. At a forum presented at Western Michigan, Hodgkinson predicted that the 1990's will bring an increase in the number of minorities, especially Blacks, to the nation's colleges and universities.[4] (Hodgkinson makes this prediction in spite of the fact that there is a general decline in high school graduates and therefore in the college eligible group.) Western believes that a Black faculty may help to provide role models for students and culturally influence and ethnically embellish a predominantly white faculty, thus making that faculty more sensitive to and more effective with Black students. To address these concerns, this university has undertaken a number of remedial steps, including the creation of The Black College Program. The major purpose of this program is to provide a vehicle for the professional development of faculty from historically Black colleges and universities through advanced training and graduate degree programs. Western recognizes that historical Black colleges and universities comprise the largest and best pool of Black faculty and graduate students. The program seeks to have junior faculty from the participating Black institutions enroll in appropriate graduate programs in order to work toward an advanced degree or to receive specialized training. In order to make graduate study more practical, Western offers financial

assistance in the form of fellowships and assistantships. The program encourages reciprocal financial support from the faculty member's own institution. By so doing Western hopes to establish a cooperative network and solidify the faculty member's commitment to return and be even more productive at his/her sponsoring institution.

A purpose that is closely aligned with the aforetioned is one that is designed to offer students who have received bachelor's or master's degrees the opportunity for an advanced degree at Western. By doing so, Western hopes to increase the number of Blacks holding advanced degrees and recruit outstanding graduates to become members of its faculty.

Western believes that its Black College Program will benefit those who participate in it, the historical Black institutions from which participants come, and Western Michigan University itself. Black faculty from historical Black institutions will have an opportunity to sharpen academic skills and work towards advanced degrees. Historical Black institutions will benefit by increasing their number of Black faculty with terminal degrees and upgraded skills and knowledge. Finally, Western Michigan University will benefit from its own Black College Program in a number of ways.

While Black faculty attend Western and work toward terminal degrees, many will serve as teaching graduates and research assistants. By so doing Black faculty will serve as role models for students, and Western's faculty

and students will be exposed to the unique views and perspectives as articulated by a wider cross section of Americans. Western Michigan feels also that the increased participation and visibility of Blacks would assist in advancing the institution toward the affirmative action policies to which it has been committed for some time. Finally, the Black College Program will be proactive and move Western in a direction that prepares the institution for the projected changing student enrollment of the 1990's.

Thus far Western has had relatively good success with its Black College Program. It has recruited four participants from historical Black institutions in spite of its short two-year operation. Compared to larger institutions and private corporations, Western's budget is low and its staff small, though enthusiastic and energetic. Energy is one of the keys--energy, time and money. The phenomenal causes of too few Black faculty is multifaceted and is made further complex by many variables, some of which may be even insidious. The problems created by the shortage, as serious as they are, may be even worse if the situation is allowed to go unchecked. All astute educators are at least aware of the problem and that awareness, hopefully, will provide the springboard toward eradicating it.

FOOTNOTES

[1]William B. Harvey, "Where are the Black Faculty Members?," The Chronicle of Higher Education, January 22, 1986, p. 96.

[2]Elizabeth Kolbert, "Minority Faculty: Bleak Future," The New York Times, Education Insert, August 18, 1985, p. 42.

[3]"Minority Faculty: Expanding the Pool," Ford Foundation Letter, Vol. 16, No. 4, August 1, 1985, p. 1.

[4]Harold L. Hodgkinson, "Guess Who's Coming to College," an address at Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan, Winter, 1984.